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Anti-mask rallies held across Canada despite increased support for mandatory masks



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EDMONTON -- Rallies decrying mandatory mask policies were held in several Canadian cities on Sunday, with protesters calling for "freedom of choice" despite concerns of a resurgence of COVID-19 cases in several provinces. Protesters gathered in cities including Vancouver, Calgary, Saskatoon, Winnipeg and Ottawa in support of the "March to Unmask" movement, arguing that wearing masks in public spaces should be voluntary and not mandated by the government. Rally organizers say they're concerned about policies based on fear, citing mixed messaging about the effectiveness of masks in preventing the spread of the novel coronavirus, and noting that people should have the right to choose how to protect themselves from the disease.



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 Cody Payant, former People's Party of Canada (PPC) candidate and organizer of the March to Unmask protest in Saskatoon, says that the government's mixed messaging about the effectiveness of face masks is a red flag. "It's not actually making anyone safer. It's just that people are scared," Payant told CTV Saskatoon. "The government is using that fear. People are scared, and they think that they have to wear masks and think that anyone who is not wearing a mask is putting their health in danger and it's just propaganda." In Calgary, protesters held signs that read "End the tyranny" and "I will not wear your fear." Similar marches were held in Edmonton, Montreal, Regina, and London, Ont. The protests were held just one day after Quebec's mandatory mask rule went into effect, mandating that anyone over the age of 12 wear face coverings in all indoor public places – a move that was also met with protests. Nova Scotia will also require public transit drivers and passengers to wear masks beginning on July 24. Similar orders had already been issued on the municipal level in various cities across Ontario. The city of Toronto enacted a mandatory mask policy on July 7, requiring masks to be worn on public transportation, as well as inside shops, grocery stores and malls. In Alberta, Calgary City Council is set to debate a municipal rule on Monday. However, Edmonton's mayor believes the issue of mandatory masks should be decided by the province. Alberta Premier Jason Kenney says he won't mandate masks in the province, but has advised that people wear them to prevent a second lockdown that would halt economic activity. "I hear people say that mask wearing is a globalist idea. I will remind them that I was advocating mask use when the World Health Organization - a global organization - was recommending against it," Kenney said at a press briefing Saturday. "My pitch to those folks, if they're upset about mask usage, the alternative will inevitably be more widespread suspensions of economic activity if we get a second outbreak." Canada's public health agency, as well as the World Health Organization (WHO), recommend the use of a non-medical face covering as an important step in slowing the spread of COVID-19 when combined with regular preventive actions including hand-washing and physical distancing in public settings. In other jurisdictions where mandatory masking has been put in place... they have had a substantial decrease in transmission of the illness," Dr. Joe Vipond, a spokesperson for pro-mask group Masks4Canada, told CTV Calgary. "It really seems to be one of the key elements to a successful COVID mitigation strategy." However, Canadian sentiment regarding the use of masks has varied. A recent poll from Iger and the Association of Canadian Studies found a nearly 10 per cent increase in support for masking among Canadians between June 26 and July 12. The poll found 67 per cent of Canadians support mandatory masking for all indoor public spaces, compared to 58 per cent just two weeks prior. Only 27 per cent were against the measure and six per cent were not sure. However, previous polls found that Canadians were [less eager to wear face masks than their American neighbours](#). According to data from British polling firm YouGov released in early July, nearly three in five Canadians reported as of June 11 that they were regularly wearing face masks when out in public. This was one of the lower rates of face-mask usage of countries surveyed.

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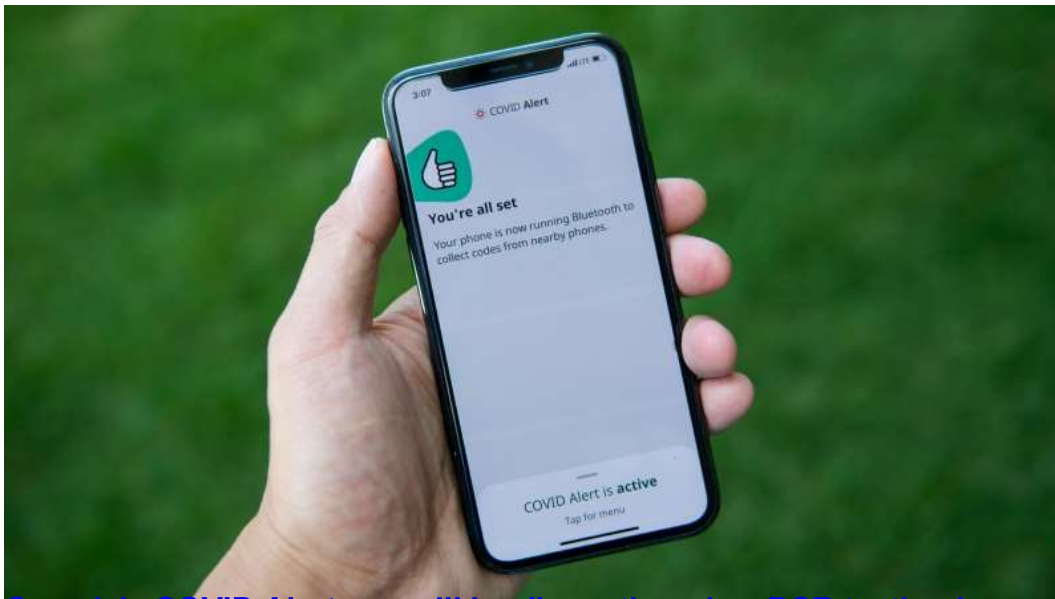


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